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Title:- Continuing Professional Development: Academics as teachers, learners, members of learning communities

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Abstract

This presentation provided an overview and enabled discussion about a qualitative, multi-case study research project in its early stages. The research is set within the context of contemporary UK Higher Education policy and focuses on developing an understanding of the influences on and conceptions of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in academia. The presenter proposed three levels of potential influence on academics' CPD practices: the national policy context; the local organisational policy and cultural context.

Extended Abstract

This presentation set out to provide an introduction and overview of a research project in progress. The three-year project is set within the context of contemporary UK Higher Education (HE) policy. The presenter summarised early literature reviews, piloting work, and sample data to provide an outline of a piece of on-going research that focuses on developing an understanding of the influences on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) practices in academia. The research project is grounded in an exploration of CPD for academics and will include consideration of the influence of academic identity (Clegg 2003); professionalism; and disciplinarity (Clegg 2003), on the ways in which academics perceive and behave in respect of their continuing professional development and lifelong learning.

The presentation outlined three levels of potential influence on academics' CPD practices: the structural, national policy context; the local organisational policy and cultural context; and the individual level. Examples of some of the research themes that will be discussed include: the intention and influence of national policy, including analysis of how policy is interpreted, implemented and impacts upon practice; induction into the professional/ institutional community; collectivity and social learning in academia (Knight 2006); and the motivations, intentions and actions of academics in respect of CPD. The paper examined how the study set out to explore issues of accountability (Schuller and Field 2002) and evidence-based practice. It also considers the possible implications of external demands (Cullingford 2002) in the context of Higher Education in the UK for continued development of academics.

The research is being carried out using qualitative methods through a multi-case study approach, which includes data collected from a number of UK Universities. The sampling strategy includes academics working both in vocationally-based subject areas and 'pure' subject-areas. Data is being collected through interviews taking a biographical, narrative method, to enable analysis of the influence of learning and career development over time. Additionally, semi-structured interviews

with other key personnel (for example, those responsible for staff development) and documentary analysis at all levels are being employed.
The paper and the research project that it summarises are likely to raise issues of concern across the whole Higher Education sector.

References:-

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